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Cultural insecurity and its discursive crystallisation in contemporary France

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses the emergence in French public discourse since 2010 of the term 'insécurité culturelle' ('cultural insecurity'). It traces firstly the take-up of the term outside France since the 1980s in anglophone written news media. It establishes four received meanings for the term: a 'pure' cultural insecurity expressing simply a relation to the arts world; a nationally refracted cultural insecurity that expresses that relation through the prism of relations between nations; an anthropologico-political conception; and a conception related to the human development paradigm. The take-up in France of the term has conformed to the anthropologico-political conception. Developments after 2002 in France created propitious conditions for coupling the semantic fields of 'culture' and 'insecurity'. The term itself was launched from 2010 through the work of two quite different 'discursive entrepreneurs' associated with the erstwhile 'popular left' current close to the French Socialist Party (Christophe Guilluy and Laurent Bouvet). The article analyses in both linguistic and political perspectives how the expression has been taken up since 2012 in the national press in France. In particular, it explores the debate concerning the purchase of the term on reality, and its current discursive fit with the agendas of the mainstream and far right.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article analyse l'émergence dans le discours public français depuis 2010 du terme « insécurité culturelle ». Il trace d'abord l'utilisation du terme depuis les années 1980 dans la presse écrite anglophone à travers le monde. Il y établit quatre sens principaux : une insécurité culturelle « pure » qui exprime un rapport au monde de l'art (sous toutes ses formes) ; une insécurité culturelle réfractée à travers le prisme des rapports entre certaines nations ; une conception anthropologico-politique ; et une conception articulée sur le paradigme du « développement humain ». En France, l'appropriation du terme a suivi le chemin du sens anthropologico-politique. Le contexte social et politique en France après 2002 a fourni des conditions propices au rapprochement des champs sémantiques de la « culture » et de l'« insécurité ». L'expression « insécurité culturelle » elle-même a été lancée seulement à partir de 2010 par le travail de

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MOTS CLÉS

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deux « entrepreneurs discursifs » assez différents (Christophe Guilluy et Laurent Bouvet) associés pour un temps au courant « Gauche populaire » proche du Parti socialiste français. L'article analyse d'une perspective linguistique et politique comment l'expression a été amplement reprise et déployée depuis 2012 dans la presse nationale en France. Il explore notamment le débat sur la validité du terme et son appropriation discursive par la droite et l'extrême droite.

Why has the phrase 'insécurité culturelle' recently become a prominent component of French public discourse, and what does this tell us about contemporary political realignments in the country? In a combined sweep across two major databases for French national written media (and eliminating duplications), we find seven articles containing the precise expression for the period 1995–2011; 54 for the shorter period 2012–2014; and 116 for the even shorter period January 2015 to July 2016 (see Appendix 1).¹ The abrupt and sustained rise in occurrences from 2012 is generally associated with the work of two rather different writers, Christophe Guilluy and Laurent Bouvet, whom we present in this article as 'discursive entrepreneurs'. Although these writers are virtually always portrayed in the French mediated public discussion as 'forging' or 'conceptualising' the notion in its now dominant politicised sense, a wider global search across anglophone media reveals a much longer and more variegated discursive history across a range of nations. A brief initial analysis of this anglophone corpus provides a useful way of illuminating the particularity of the term's subsequent crystallisation in French public discourse. We will then trace how French political discourse between 2002 and 2012 provided fertile terrain for coupling the semantic domains of 'culture' and 'security', before identifying the key traits in that explicit verbal pairing as operated respectively by Guilluy and Bouvet. Finally, we will analyse how the term was appropriated more broadly in the French public sphere from 2012.

This case study adopts a discursively orientated approach to illuminate the renewed salience of reactively asserted national cultural identities that is such a striking feature of the contemporary Western political scene. It is informed by the recent research on cultural hegemony which builds on classic references (Gramsci and Forgacs 2000; Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Hall 1988) in order to analyse the culture-based strategies of the contemporary French right (Ahearne 2014; Brustier and Huelin 2011; Lindner forthcoming; Musso 2009). Such studies have tended to focus on the hegemonic struggles to 'capture' already existing and consecrated symbolic motifs (*laïcité*, 'national identity', an educational *socle commun* etc.). This case study, by contrast, examines the emergence of a new motif, 'insécurité culturelle', which arises originally in France on the left as a problem-framing device before becoming the object of a wider problem-promoting competition (cf. Kingdon 2003). In accounting for this emergence, I propose the concept of a 'discursive entrepreneur' to describe the agents responsible for projecting the term into public discourse, and the metaphor of 'crystallisation' to convey the process by which an initially polysemic phrase becomes 'set' in terms of a particular understanding. More generally, the study emerges from a move within cultural policy studies to frame cultural strategy as a generalised dimension rather than a discrete sector of contemporary government (Ahearne 2009; Bennett 2009).

Usage abroad: established but neglected precedent

If one were to consult only the works of its discursive entrepreneurs in France and its subsequent appropriation in the national press, one would assume that the collocation ‘insécurité culturelle’ is a recent and French coinage (as these contain virtually no reference, if any, to its existence in other nations or languages). One would then discover with some surprise, on launching a search in the Dow Jones Factiva database for all anglophone publications and all dates, that there were 88 articles with a mention of ‘cultural insecurity’ between October 1981 and June 1996, 127 between June 1996 and June 2006, and some 157 between June 2006 and June 2016 (see Appendix 2).² The provenance of these articles shows certain geographical and historical patterns, and also allows us to draw up a provisional typology of potential meanings for ‘cultural insecurity’. A succinct summary of these findings will help us subsequently to demonstrate what is specific (but not exceptional) about the French case.

The country with the highest number of articles in the corpus is, by some distance, Canada. This includes Quebec, and it is very surprising that the ‘cultural insecurity’ debate in France has not been connected with that in francophone Quebec. But Canada itself as a whole is also frequently the subject of the articles (with a recurrent trope being for Canadian commentators to claim their country’s reputed supremacy in matters of cultural insecurity—e.g. *The Globe and Mail*, October 28, 1992). Other anglophone countries, embroiled in various kinds of asymmetrical relations with each other, include the USA, Australia, New Zealand and even, more recently, the UK itself. There are also articles from publications in India, Malaysia, Singapore and Iran (the latter as captured by BBC newsgathering services), as well as UNESCO.

One can discern three principal overlapping senses for the term as it features in this corpus. The first we might call ‘pure’ cultural insecurity. This is the anxiety around artistic taste, the fear that one’s tastes are not sufficiently legitimate, or distinctive, or cool, depending on context. Its relations with social class and status are well attested. This is an extensive topic in its own right, but is not directly relevant to the subject-matter of this article. Certainly, as any reader of Bourdieu would know, the condition if not the name has been well established in France (Bourdieu 1979). However, it was not with this sense that the term has been taken up in France in recent years.

The second sense we might call nationally refracted cultural insecurity. It takes up the first meaning but combines it with a strong sense of national and/or territorial affiliation and exclusion. This takes as its breeding ground various kinds of artistic genre (from painting to popular music), but can spill out beyond these to a broader sense of cultural worth and its opposite. It involves relations between historical models and epigones, between colonisers and colonised, between various kinds of centre and periphery, between dominant powers and subaltern satellites (the same countries can permute their respective positions according to the lines of force involved—for example, the USA, the UK and France). It can be expressed, for example, in the relations between American, Canadian or Australian architectural planners and the architectural models of Europe (e.g. *Sydney Morning Herald*, July 9, 1992). It can be expressed in Australian envy of the supposedly uncomplicated cultural confidence of UK popular culture production, and in New Zealander envy of the supposedly uncomplicated cultural confidence of Australian popular culture production (*The Age* [Australia], December 11, 2009; *Sunday Star-Times* [New Zealand], December 7, 2003) (in a psychoanalytic sense, such sentiments of nationally refracted cultural insecurity are almost invariably associated with the projection of a notionally more secure ‘other’). It can be expressed in the aspiration of Singaporean festival programmers to step beyond the shadow of China (*The Straits Times*, September 20, 2007). It is also a sentiment that can be

attributed to others, as a means of explaining irrational behaviour or perceptual impairment. Interestingly, France enters the corpus as the object but not the subject of such attribution, as American commentators in the wake of the 1993 GATT negotiations explain its resistance to American film and music imports in terms of rigidified cultural insecurity (e.g. *New York Times*, December 8, 1993).

The third sense of cultural insecurity we might label 'anthropologico-political'. We can invoke the anthropological because it concerns the vulnerability of a whole 'way of life' conceived as such (its symbols, rituals, language and norms). We can call it political because it is nearly always used in view of the practical preservation or mutation of that way of life. It can be deployed as a term of discredit, suggesting that a group's perception is ill-adjusted or their behaviour irrational because their thinking is overshadowed by the condition seen as a kind of paranoid 'useless passion'. But it can also be presented as a climate or sentiment that must be taken into account, and that may be well founded. The primary example here is Quebec, which figures early on and prominently in the corpus. The expression is part of the stock vocabulary for discussing the relations between Quebec and the rest of Canada (and also for discussing relations between the anglophone and other minorities and the francophone majority within Quebec itself). What is at stake is seldom artistic expression, but rather the institutions of language, schooling, secularism and political self-determination. The Quebec case is in some ways rather *sui generis*, given the combination of factors at play. But we also see the anthropologico-political sense of cultural insecurity emerging in other contexts that very much foreshadow its subsequent take-up in France. It refers to the anxieties produced by immigration, economic globalisation and post-traditional values among populations which had hitherto been the core electorates of left-wing governing parties, but who were now being pulled into the orbit of far-right populist parties. Thus there are articles using the term to describe the appeal of Pauline Hansen in Australia in 1998 ('Letter from Australia', *New Straits Times*, June 10, 1998); the New Zealand First Party from 2002 (*New Zealand Herald*, November 19, 2002 and April 19, 2005); or the 'List Pim Fortuyn' in the Netherlands in 2002 (as reported in *Financial Times*, May 16, 2002). It would not be an exaggeration to say that these pieces contain all the key ingredients in the subsequent crystallisation of the term in France, even if, as we shall show, that crystallisation does have to be understood in terms of the specificities of the French political landscape.

There is also a fourth sense that emerges in the corpus, albeit in reference to developing rather than developed countries. It is not a prominent sense, but it is worth evoking briefly if only to counter the suggestions of some left-based critiques that the term is inherently vitiated and inevitably legitimates the path that takes voters from the left to the far right. We might call this the 'human development' sense insofar as its initially most prominent occurrence is in commentaries on the Human Development Report of 1999 (Human Development Report Team 1999, 3–5, 36). The report lists various forms of 'insecurity' which impede human flourishing across the world, particularly in developing countries—economic insecurity, job and income insecurity, food insecurity, health insecurity, personal insecurity, environmental insecurity, political and community insecurity. 'Cultural insecurity' also features in this list, and refers here to the effects of asymmetrical global flows of 'weightless goods' as associated with transnational cultural industries (4), though the categories taken as a whole give ample scope for a more 'anthropologico-political' conception of human security. In our view, this is a perspective that would be worth developing in its own right, but the present article is not the place to do this.³

Security in the culture-shaping policies of the post-2002 governing right

It is well known that ‘insecurity’ came to be the decisive theme of the French 2002 presidential election and its immediate aftermath. A series of violence-related ‘faits divers’ had been given high prominence by ratings-hungry televisual media (notably TF1); this indirectly determined the political weather, allowing the outgoing prime minister Lionel Jospin to be portrayed as weak by his rivals Jacques Chirac and, of course, Jean-Marie Le Pen (Charon 2007; Kuhn 2004).⁴ It has also been shown that rival culture-shaping policies formed a key dimension of the presidencies of both Jacques Chirac and Nicolas Sarkozy during the ensuing decade. These were not principally associated with the conventional domains of arts policy, but worked across heavily charged policy fields of a broader French ‘culture’ such as laicity, education, national memory and representations of national media (Ahearne 2014). Unsurprisingly, questions of ‘security’ were foregrounded in the contrasting bids of the two presidents to secure a new cultural hegemony for the right.

This is evident, firstly, in the way in which the executive ‘theatricalised’ its response to the kinds of physical violence and threat most directly denoted by the term ‘insecurity’. In apparent reaction to a killing that appeared to have been a copycat imitation of a television film, Chirac in the first months after his re-election instituted a prominent commission on television and violence chaired by a leading intellectual (Kriegel 2003). Already during his period as interior minister under Chirac, Sarkozy was careful to contrive stagings of early morning police raids on suspected criminals where he himself was present (Charon 2007, 193–194; Jost and Muzet 2011, 35–36). Islam as such also became increasingly ‘securitised’ in its representations, from Sarkozy’s televised confrontation with a Muslim audience hostile to the idea that women should remove their veil for identity photographs to the image-driven controversy around the burqa legislation of 2010 (Baubérot 2011, ch. 5; Bowen 2007). Through the storytelling performances of each president ran a cumulative seam of representations where they stood in bold relief against threats to the Republic’s physical security.

Secondly, in often conflicting ways, the two presidents cast themselves as defenders of the symbolic ‘security’ of French culture itself. This can be seen in the figurative leitmotifs that gathered around the key fronts of their culture-shaping policies. A recurrent metaphor was that of the *socle*, the foundational ‘solidity’ of a French culture (a set of references and attitudes) to be protected from the disturbing liquidity induced by globalised capitalism, migrational flows and multicultural modernity. Thus laicity became a *socle* of the Republic itself (Stasi 2003, 111); educational reform revolved around a guaranteed if disputed *socle commun* (for example, Thélot 2004, 49); Sarkozy’s aborted *grand projet* was designed by its promoters to give a ‘new visibility to a foundation [*socle*] of common historical culture’ (Lemoine 2008, 22); the architects of the internationally directed news broadcaster *France 24* were concerned with consolidating a journalistic capacity that could provide a ‘veritable foundation [*socle*] for a new channel in the planetary panorama’ (Kert 2003, 7). The metaphorical flourishing of this and associated terms can be traced across the kind of grey literature of reports not renowned for their rhetorical luxuriance. It indicates how the task of ‘hardening’ or solidifying the image of French culture against diverse threats was working its way through the political imaginary of the period.

Matters of security were being brought into representational strategies for cultural hegemony; and French culture was projected as something to be secured against threats of liquefaction or volatilisation from both within and without. In retrospect, it is surprising that

the explicit collocation ‘insécurité culturelle’ did not emerge earlier as a strategic reference in political debate, especially given its ready availability within other national debates. The sustained discursive pairing of the two terms in the French context would require a deliberate and calculated intellectual intervention. When it did emerge in explicit terms, however, the expression would both connect with and recast the seams sketched out above. It would directly interrogate the political programmes not just of the mainstream right, but also of the post-2012 governing left, the far left and the far right (the latter would, in the view of many, become central in the definition of a comprehensive cultural insecurity agenda).

Discursive entrepreneurs: Christophe Guilluy and Laurent Bouvet

There are some scattered occurrences of the term ‘insécurité culturelle’ in the French national press in the years preceding 2012. Some of these refer to international affairs—a reference to the Quebec context of 1995, where of course it was omnipresent (*Le Monde*, October 27, 1995); a reference, translated from the *Washington Post*, to George Bush’s traditional values agenda of 2004 (*Le Figaro*, July 15, 2004); an ironic citation of a 2008 speech from Yo Yo Ma at Davos (*Les Échos*, January 28, 2008); a citation of an American food critic’s ironic description of France’s move to put its gastronomic traditions on the UNESCO list of intangible heritage (*Agence France Presse*, March 2, 2008). On the domestic front, there is, arrestingly, a citation attributed by Reuters in 1998 to Jean-Marie Le Pen, and a *Libération* editorial by Serge July in the wake of the 2002 presidential elections—neither of these occurrences flag up the term in any metalinguistic manner (Reuters, ‘Les actualités en français’, February 1, 1998; *Libération*, May 6, 2002). Although the latter two occurrences very much anticipate the sense of the specifically French generalised take-up of the term from 2012, it could hardly be presented as a stock reference in the repertory of political debate before that time.

The introduction of the term into general public discourse in France was largely the work of two ‘discursive entrepreneurs’, the controversial geographer Christophe Guilluy and the political scientist Laurent Bouvet. By describing them as ‘discursive entrepreneurs’, as political scientists speak of ‘policy entrepreneurs’ (Kingdon 2003, 179–183), I do not mean that their prime intention was to modify the French linguistic repertory. Guilluy, a self-defined geographer working often as a consultant for local government and housing associations, put forward the term to bring out demographic dynamics that, he thought, would go unperceived without a concept to grasp them. Laurent Bouvet is a political scientist close to the French Socialist Party. He takes up the term, whose authorship he attributes to Guilluy, and somewhat inflects it in an attempt to modify the strategy of the Socialist Party. Both authors, however, become associated with the term—it is attributed variously to the one or the other. Both are summoned not just to define it or illustrate its usefulness, but to defend its very ethical and ‘scientific’ legitimacy. In this respect, they became its entrepreneurs, both launching it and sustaining it in its existence before it reaches the stages of a more anonymous linguistic availability.

The key publication as regards the French launching of the term was Guilluy’s *Fractures françaises* (Guilluy 2013; originally published 2010). Guilluy states in the later book *La France périphérique* that he had ‘created the concept’ in the early 2000s in consultation work focused on the management of social housing for different ethnic groups, but he provides no references to any of this early work (Guilluy 2015, 153; originally published 2014). Although neither Guilluy nor Bouvet make any reference at all to the extensive established anglophone

(and Quebec francophone) legacy of the expression, they certainly set the terms in which it would be taken up in French public discourse.

The expression is a recurrent strategic reference in *Fractures françaises*; it is absent for the first 130 pages of the *La France périphérique*, but it then saturates its long final chapter. In these two works, as well as in multiple media articles and interviews, Guilluy draws the term into a specific semantic field whose terms become charged with particular kinds of weight and polarity. 'Security' had already accumulated by this time a number of habitual adjectival couplings (see, for example, Castel 2003). Guilluy explains that the kinds of insecurity he wants to bring out are grafted on to the forms of economic and 'social' insecurity associated with liberal globalisation (2013, 56), but that they add to this a 'supplementary' cultural dimension which the left has thus far been unable to address (175–176). The culture at issue is understood in anthropological terms, as the sets of references, symbols, rituals and forms of exchange that make up a given lifeworld. Guilluy sees established French lifeworlds as being assailed by 'demographic instability' (2015, 139) and 'migratory fluxes' leading to forms of 'cultural destructuration' (2013, 155). The relation between migration and cultural insecurity tends to be conceived by Guilluy in one-directional terms (the effect of migrants on established cultural lifeworlds, rather than the breakup of the migrants' own cultural lifeworld in the process of their migration). He emphasises in particular the flipping of majority and minority status, as certain areas become dominated by recent immigrants and remaining established populations express feelings of marginalisation (14).

Guilluy's analyses are accompanied by a controversial remapping of France. He sees the nation as divided between those areas integrated into the dynamics of globalisation and those marginalised and left behind by those dynamics. The integrated areas are the cosmopolitan 'metropoles' and directly adjacent suburbs. Although the latter conventionally mark the very epitome of insecurity and disadvantage, Guilluy portrays them as integrated because they work as entry points ('sas') for successive waves of international cheap labour, because they have direct access to the (subaltern) job markets of the metropole, and because they have (in Guilluy's contested analysis) disproportionate access to public subsidy. The relegated areas represent the 'peripheries' of France which are Guilluy's central concern—the 'periurban' stretches beyond the metropolises' adjacent suburbs, as well as the semi-rural and rural zones to which the working and lower middle classes have retreated, excluded from the cosmopolitan metropolises by property prices and repelled from the adjacent suburbs, in Guilluy's analysis, owing to experiences or fears of 'cultural insecurity'. Guilluy's focus is on what he calls the 'autochtones' (2013, 155; 2015, 146), or the 'catégories populaires d'origine française et d'immigration ancienne' (2015, 150). These populations have, he argues, lost their erstwhile role as a 'réfèrent culturel' (a cardinal reference point for French culture, but also something like a cultural arbitrator). This is sometimes presented as the direct experience of white working-class populations in areas where ethnic majority and minority statuses have 'flipped'. At other times it refers to a more general neglect or disdain for such populations in a purportedly 'multiculturalist' France (2013, 155; 2015, 146). Guilluy even suggests that these sentiments of cultural insecurity are laying the ground for a new class alignment in contemporary France:

C'est dans ces espaces périurbains que se précarise une partie de la classe moyenne. Si elle se définit par la surreprésentation des catégories populaires, la sociologie de la France périphérique se construit aussi sur un sentiment de plus en plus marqué d'une relégation sociale et culturelle. Cette perception tend à rapprocher culturellement des catégories hier opposées. L'ouvrier en

milieu rural, l'employé du lotissement bas de gamme, le chômeur des régions industrielles, le petit paysan, partagent la même insécurité et la conviction que le processus de mondialisation n'a pas contribué à améliorer leur condition d'existence. (Guilluy 2013, 115)

The cultural insecurity felt or feared by these populations creates, in Guilluy's view, a countervailing attraction for various models of 'security', from the 'habitat pavillonnaire' imagined slightly implausibly as a form of 'village' (2015, 129–173) to the kinds of 'protective' national storytelling performed by politicians such as Nicolas Sarkozy (2013, 179).

Guilluy's writings are not overtly aligned in politically partisan terms, though he was involved in 2011 in the launch of the 'Gauche populaire' current within the French Socialist Party (see below). His analyses could certainly be associated with a broadly left-leaning sensibility, with their attention to populations left behind by liberal global capitalism, though the criteria for defining such political alignments have become much less straightforward. However, the analyses have also appealed, as we shall see, to influential elements of the nationalist or 'sovereignist' sections of the mainstream right, as well as the far right, who have each taken up the vocabulary of cultural insecurity in forthright terms. By contrast, the term's other prominent discursive entrepreneur, Laurent Bouvet, writes much more clearly and explicitly with the aim of influencing the strategy of the Socialist Party itself. Bouvet critiques the governing left's dual emphasis since 1983 on aligning itself excessively with the demands of international global capital while 'masking' this capitulatory attitude with a compensatory championing of multiculturalism and diversity which allows it to maintain its role as champion of social progress. There is some ambiguity in Bouvet's analyses as to whether he criticises the left's championing of cultural and ethnic diversity because it has acted as a fig leaf and alibi, or whether he criticises it for its own sake—the weakest parts of his argument revolve around a championing of republican 'commonality' as if this could somehow bypass the recognition of the particularities that constitute it (Bouvet 2015, Conclusion). The key burden of Bouvet's writings in this respect, however, is the use of the term 'cultural insecurity' to explain why so many of the French lower middle and working classes have abandoned not just the Socialist Party but the left altogether.

Bouvet himself takes up the term in 2012 in a newspaper article commenting on the first round of the presidential elections (*Le Monde*, April 25, 2012). He puts forward the idea—that he would later develop as a more sustained research 'hypothesis' in a book (Bouvet 2015)—that the supposition of a 'cultural insecurity' can explain the difference between the scores of the far left and the far right. Marine Le Pen had obtained 17.9% of the vote in the first round, compared with Jean-Luc Mélenchon's 11.1%; but, in terms of their core target constituencies among 'working-class' voters and lower middle-class 'employees', their scores were respectively at 33% and 28% for Le Pen, and just 18% and 11% for Mélenchon (Bouvet 2015, ch. 7, sect. 2). The scale of 'protection' offered by both the Front de gauche and the Front national in terms of their anti-neoliberal social and economic programmes was broadly similar. The differences between their programmes lay at the 'cultural' level (in the anthropologico-political sense outlined above)—their attitudes to immigration, Islam, cultural tradition and the symbols associated with French national identity. This, in Bouvet's analysis, is the key factor in the haemorrhaging of support from the left's erstwhile core electorate. To attract such voters again, the left would have to assuage not just their social and economic concerns, but also the anxieties associated with 'cultural' destructuration.

Notwithstanding this electoral parting of the ways, the 2012 presidential and legislative elections appeared initially to vindicate the 'Terra Nova' strategy as articulated in 2011 in

a study published by that think tank and entitled *Gauche: quelle majorité électorale pour 2012?* (Ferrand, Jeanbart, and Prudent 2012). The authors of this study had appeared to take as inevitable the loss of large swathes of the traditional working class to the populist appeal of the mainstream and far right, and argued that the Socialist Party should focus instead on cosmopolitanly inclined professional classes of the metropolises and the ethnic minorities (essentially Muslim) who had been alienated under Sarkozy's presidency. This could appear viable in 2012, with estimates of between 86% to 93% of the Muslim vote going to the Socialist candidate (Fourquet 2012; Kepel and Jardin 2015, ch. 2). However, the emphasis given in the first years of the Hollande presidency to a different kind of cultural or 'societal' programme, around gay marriage and gender studies education in schools, would alienate very substantial sections of the Muslim vote, leaving the Socialist Party with only the public sector professional classes as its core electorate—scarcely enough to build a convincing electoral programme (Bouvet 2015, ch. 1). Bouvet and several other activists, including Guilluy, had already set up in 2011 a current entitled 'La Gauche populaire' in order to reorientate the programmes of the party in the direction of its historical working-class and lower middle-class vote (for their manifesto, see Baumel and Kalfon 2011). On their agenda were both the introduction of flagship economic policies designed to deal with economic and social insecurities, and the reduction of 'cultural insecurity' as it affected these populations.

In addition to its more sustained integration within a specifically Socialist Party framework, Bouvet consistently flags up one other key difference between his and Guilluy's deployment of the term. Guilluy focuses predominantly on the experience of the 'autochthonous' 'popular' classes (even if he looks to take at least some of the specifically ethnic charge out of this by including the experience of 'established' immigrants, including Muslims, when faced with new waves of immigrants, for example from sub-Saharan countries [Guilluy 2015, 138]). Bouvet, by contrast, invokes a broader apprehension of cultural insecurity that would contain both the displacement of traditional French cultural lifeworlds and also the acute cultural fragmentation experienced by uprooted and not necessarily rerooted immigrants.

This discussion of 'insécurité culturelle', focused on the work of its two primary discursive entrepreneurs, has shown how the expression was expressly seeded in French public discourse from 2010 (the publication of *Fractures françaises*), in advance of its broader mediated take-up from 2012 onwards. Its primary sense as crystallised here is clearly anthropologico-political: it is concerned not with arts and heritage, but with the symbolic and ritual lifeworlds of particular populations. It is generally used not simply (if at all) to describe those lifeworlds, but rather as a politically hortatory device, to point to action that needs to be undertaken to address the insecurities concerned. It undoubtedly (in this author's view) serves to identify a key cluster of factors in the processes of disaffiliation and reaffiliation that have so marked the French political landscape in recent decades (Bouvet's use of the term as a 'hypothesis' to explain the difference in appeal between the Front de gauche and the Front national is convincing in this respect). At the same time, its political implications, as well as the range of its connotations, have proven to be highly ambiguous. It was coined on the intellectual left, but has not really been taken up in formal terms by the left, and indeed many intellectuals and analysts on the left have looked to banish the term as inept, illegitimate or toxic. This may be in part because it touches on some of the inveterate antinomies of the left (the commitment to the economically vulnerable and the commitment to 'progressive' views on cultural plurality). It is also in significant part because

the term has been embraced so fully by both politicians and commentators on the far right and the nationalist sections of the mainstream right (whose antinomies lie elsewhere). The fault-lines which it reveals are complex and tangled, as will be revealed further by a discursive analysis of its initial appropriation in the national written media from 2012.

Cultural insecurity and its *mise en discours*

The introduction into the shared public language of a new collocation, or of a new sense for an established collocation, is not straightforward. It can be proposed by discursive entrepreneurs but then ignored or promptly rejected. If it makes headway, this is likely to involve a protracted sense of negotiation and conflict. Is it necessary or useful? Public discourse is a crowded field, and any discursive innovation may remain a hapax. Does it resonate, and if so, is that because it uncovers an unrecognised truth (a relation between things) or masks a truth (through the quid pro quos of flattery, connotation and circumlocution)? Who ‘owns’ the expression, and is there scope to take it over? We can see all these interrogations at work as ‘insécurité culturelle’ became a stock reference for political debate in the French public sphere from 2012.

The capacity of the expression to resonate, and to generate comment on a lasting basis, was soon apparent (‘voilà un concept qui fera parler,’ Laurent Joffrin could still observe in 2015, an experienced newspaper editor with antennae for what would generate copy [*Libération*, February 7, 2015]). Various discursive markers nonetheless betray, to begin with, the relative novelty and unfamiliarity of the term. It is often attributed to one of its discursive entrepreneurs (‘ce que Laurent Bouvet appelle l’“insécurité culturelle”’ [Caroline Fourest in *Le Monde*, June 16, 2012]). It figures initially more often than not in inverted commas. As we shall see, these can fulfil a number of functions—from signalling linguistic novelty or discursive authorship to forms of critical distanciation extending to an outright evacuation of the term’s claims to significance. Even one of the term’s promoters seems a little linguistically insecure about the apparent neologism, speaking of ‘une troisième [insécurité] que j’appelle faute de mieux “insécurité culturelle”’ (Bouvet in *Marianne*, March 16, 2013). There is no discernible sense that this is an established expression elsewhere in the world, and one has the sense of a term initially being handled, as it were, with pincers.

There was nonetheless one straightforward pathway through which the term could slip into established usage. ‘Insécurité’ itself had been an established policy concern since at least the Peyrefitte report of 1977 (written in the context of responses to the anti-State terrorism of the 1970s) (Peyrefitte 1977). It had since then been coupled with a succession of adjectives, with the right tending to give prominence to forms of ‘civil’ insecurity (law and order), and the left to forms of ‘economic’ and then ‘social’ insecurity (Bauer and Souleuz 2010; Castel 2003; Mucchielli 2002). It was relatively straightforward to integrate ‘culturel’ as a supplementary qualification for an issue that was already perceived as having several dimensions. Guillaume Bernard, for example, wrote of a ‘conjonction des crises (insécurité physique et matérielle, insécurité économique et sociale, insécurité culturelle et morale)’ (*Atlantico*, August 10, 2013). As Bernard’s expanding list already suggests, the corpus contains other propositions for adjectival extension, though none of these quite ‘took’ in the way that cultural insecurity did. We thus find the post-positioning after ‘insécurité’ of ‘identitaire’ (Bouvet cited in *Libération*, September 29, 2012); ‘historique’ (Patrick Weil, *Libération*, July 3, 2015); ‘morale’ (Guylain Chevrier in *Atlantico*, August 10, 2013); ‘des moeurs’ (Pierre-André

Taguieff in *Le Point*, May 7, 2015); 'existentielle' (editorial, *Le Figaro*, December 7, 2015); 'vitale' (editorial, *Le Monde*, December 8, 2015). Indeed, in a curious full circle, an article in *L'Opinion* from 15 January 2016 suggests, in the wake of the gender-orientated Cologne attacks, that we must now 'add' to the issue of 'cultural insecurity' the problem of 'physical insecurity' (which was of course the original sense of the term).

The adjectivisations above tend to be cumulative in intent rather than substitutive (the authors in question propose to augment the scope of insecurity to be conceived, rather than 'correct' the term 'culturelle' by introducing an alternative descriptor). Other discursive permutations are more critically conceived. Alexis Corbière and Philippe Corcuff convert the core substantive in its turn into an adjective in order to capture for rejection en bloc a whole political agenda around security, speaking respectively of a 'culture sécuritaire' and a 'néolibéralisme sécuritaire' (*Marianne*, January 9, 2015; *Libération*, March 31, 2015). Likewise, when an author such as Corcuff arrests 'insécurité culturelle' and associated terms in inverted commas, it is not to mark their status as neologisms or even to express critical caution, but rather to invalidate their ontological claims as set in their authors' discourses to refer to anything substantial at all in reality: 'La "gauche populaire", se situant dans la galaxie du PS, va mettre l'accent sur "l'insécurité culturelle" dont "le peuple" serait menacé' (*Le Nouvel Observateur*, November 23, 2013). This evacuatory thrust becomes increasingly marked among certain critics on the left. A group of historians and intellectuals writing in *L'Humanité* write that:

Il n'y a que les publicitaires et les communicants des partis politiques pour croire que l'insécurité culturelle est un 'concept' ou la conclusion d'une recherche, que le 'racisme anti-Blancs' est un terme qui irait de soi, qui permettrait de faire émerger des réalités'. (*L'Humanité*, October 13, 2015)

The proponents of the term are discredited (they are advertising and PR agents rather than geographers or political scientists); the term itself is not even a 'concept' (the threshold between notion and concept is not explained) and has no ontological reach; it is contaminated by juxtaposition with one of the most ideologically connoted of competitors for issue salience (anti-white racism). To an outside observer, it may seem that such attacks set up Aunt Sallies for facile attacks (they berate the users of 'insécurité culturelle' for entertaining notions of 'pure', immemorial and hermetically sealed French and Muslim cultures, but it is hard to find such notions in the work of writers such as Bouvet, Guilluy or Taguieff, whatever other reservations one might have about their arguments). Likewise, their excommunicatory verdicts recall the kind of sub-Bourdiesian clerical rhetoric that discredits as 'parasavant' knowledge produced beyond the bounds of certain disciplinary schools. From our perspective, the import of these critiques is their endeavour to expunge the very expression from the stock of available vocabulary—with a group of highly consecrated intellectuals asking in February 2015 whether it is even 'légitime de parler d' "insécurité culturelle"' (*Le Monde*, February 7, 2015).

The riposte of the term's entrepreneurs and other users faced with such contestation after the term's initial launching tended to revolve around two facets: the ontological reach of the expression (the question of cultural insecurity's 'reality') and the consequences of actually using the term (a calculation of politico-discursive prudence). Many writers note that it touches on zones that are 'taboo' for the left, because they correspond to affects and anxieties that have been pre-framed by the far right (in this case, the sense among traditional working classes that the bearings of their worlds have become unmoored). As the *Charlie Hebdo* journalist Riss put it in May 2015, referring to the term 'cultural insecurity',

Cela est un sujet en soi ... Comment parler des thèmes viciés par l'extrême droite ? C'est comme la laïcité. Il faut aborder des thèmes inconfortables. (*Le Monde*, May 19, 2015)

The first move of the term's defenders may well be to assert, to quote the title of one of Bouvet's newspaper articles, that 'cultural insecurity is real' (*Le Monde*, February 7, 2015). The second step, however, is to assert that the consequences of 'naming' that reality are less dangerous than the consequences of not naming it. In Guilluy's words:

Au coeur des catégories populaires subsiste la question fondamentale de l'identité, de l'immigration et de l'insécurité culturelle. Donc être dans le déni et leur dire 'cette réalité n'existe pas' les pousse à aller du côté du Front national ou de l'abstention. (*Le Monde*, April 3, 2015)

Thus the phrase becomes drawn into a dynamic of repression and expression, parrhesia and self-censorship, circumlocution and nomination. The process is, of course, slippery. One person's frank naming ('cultural insecurity' instead of denegation) can be another person's circumlocution ('cultural insecurity' as a respectable discursive overlay for a more straightforward racism).

As well as linguistic inhibition, there are also questions of perceptual impairment. In this respect, one notices an interesting contrast with the debates on cultural insecurity in Quebec. In the Quebecan context, the term itself is used freely and without major inhibition by all sides of the debate. Under the pens of one side, it signifies a paranoid warping of perception, the brittle and irrational defensiveness of a population excessively attached to a rigid understanding of its cultural and linguistic inheritance and possibilities. Under the pens of others, it denotes the well-founded watchfulness of a cultural grouping assailed on all sides, and/or a climate of feeling which politicians would do well to take into account (with the recalcitrant existence that Marx attributed to entrenched popular belief). In the French context, the divide runs between those who use the term to denote a posited reality and those who invoke the term only to empty it of significance. For those who would use the term, its denigrators are seen as perceptually impaired. They are 'deaf' or 'blind', like the Socialist Party itself, to a fundamental reality of the contemporary social landscape (Laurent Pinsolle in *Atlantico*, July 15, 2013; Malika Sorrel-Sutter in *Le Figaro*, September 11, 2014); they cannot 'feel' its 'weight' (Jacques Rollet in *La Croix*, December 22, 2015). For those who would expel the term from the prevailing French political lexis, its proponents are assistant arsonists masquerading as firemen, offering tinder for the escalation of a blaze whose causes they claim to diagnose.

Is it possible to mediate between the two sides at all without claiming to rise above the antinomies in question? It seems clear, to this author at least, that there have arisen significant diffuse anxieties in contemporary France, both in the peripheral and periurban expanses foregrounded by Guilluy but also (*pace* the emphases of Guilluy) in the suburbs that adjoin the metropolises without belonging to them. Such anxieties have been dramatically heightened and spread by the terror crises of January 2015 and beyond. The sum of these insecurities cannot be captured by the adjectives 'civic', 'economic' and 'social', and the qualifier 'cultural' serves well to indicate their connection to the norms, symbols and rituals that define an inhabitable lifeworld. At the same time, the term 'insécurité culturelle' seems set to be a resource and a motif for the nationalist or sovereigntist sections of the mainstream right or the far right rather than the left as it moves along the spectrum from analytic tool to a political framing and rallying device. While the left has rather tied itself in knots over the legitimacy or illegitimacy of the term, major political actors such as Henri Guaino and Patrick Buisson (sovereigntist and nationalist mainstream right) or Marine Le Pen and Jacques Bompard

(far right) have directly and uninhibitedly integrated the term into their public language (respectively *Le Figaro*, June 6, 2015 and November 13, 2012; *Agence France Presse*, November 30, 2013; *Agence France Presse*, October 22, 2015). One could even argue, on the basis of the table in Appendix 1, that the role of key discursive entrepreneur for the term has passed from Guilly and Bouvet to the right-wing news site *Atlantico*. At a general level, there are perhaps partial parallels with the recent history of the term ‘laicity’—a term developed over a longer period on the left for both descriptive and prescriptive purposes before being ‘captured’ and re-inflected by the mainstream and far right in the years following 2004 (Baubérot 2011; Lindner *forthcoming*). But such hegemonic captures in the ongoing ‘cultural wars’ that have become particularly prominent in France are neither total nor permanent. As Stuart Hall once wrote in the context of the UK (where questions of ‘cultural insecurity’ have arisen recently in explicit form in the context of the Brexit vote), ‘the field of culture is a sort of constant battlefield ... a battlefield where no once-for-all victories are obtained but where there are always strategic positions to be won and lost’ (Hall 1981, 233). To forsake a term simply because it serves the immediate rhetorical interests of one’s opponent is to weaken unnecessarily one’s grip on reality.

Notes

1. The two databases Factiva and Europresse were used in conjunction to obtain a suitably full range of titles (some important titles feature in one but not the other; subsequent tallies exclude duplicates). A search was entered in the Dow Jones Factiva database for ‘insécurité culturelle’, all dates, French language, France, and all articles from national publications were then manually selected (up to 31 July 2016). A search was entered into Europresse for ‘insécurité culturelle’, all dates, for ‘France—National Press’ (also up to 31 July 2016). A tabulated summary of the results, broken down by title, can be found in Appendix 1.
2. A search was entered into the Factiva database for ‘cultural insecurity’, all dates, all regions, English-language sources. The results, broken down by country of publication, can be found in Appendix 2. Texts from international news aggregators and international agencies were excluded from the table (the numbers of these were negligible for the purposes of this article).
3. The reflections of the 1999 Human Development Report in this regard build on the work of the 1994 report, centred on a notion of ‘human security’ (though the expression ‘cultural insecurity’ itself does not figure in this earlier report) (Human Development Report Team 1994). Some indications on the notion’s possible extension within a human development framework could be sought in Martha Nussbaum’s formulation of ‘capability security’ (Nussbaum 2011).
4. ‘Insecurity’ as a political and social issue has, of course, a longer history in France (Bauer and Souleuz 2010; Bouvet 2015, ch. 2; Mucchielli 2002).

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Appendix

Table A1. Articles in French national written media which contain at least one occurrence of 'insécurité culturelle' (from Factiva and Europresse databases—see endnote 1).

	1995–2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016 to 31/7	TOTAL
<i>Atlantico</i>				9	5	12	9	35
<i>Le Monde</i>	1	1	6	3	1	14	3	29
<i>Le Figaro</i>	1		1	1	3	13	8	27
<i>Marianne</i>			6	2	1	9		18
<i>Libération</i>	1		3	1	1	9	2	17
<i>L'Opinion</i>						5	3	8
<i>L'Humanité</i>			2		1	3	1	7
<i>Agence France Presse</i>	1			1		5		7
<i>Le Point</i>					1	5		6
<i>Le Nouvel Observateur</i>				2		1	2	5
<i>Rue89</i>			1	2	1	1		5
<i>La Croix</i>						3		3
<i>Journal de Dimanche</i>						2	1	3
<i>L'Express</i>						2		2
<i>Expansion</i>						2		2
<i>Reuters</i>	1							1
<i>Les Échos</i>	1							1
<i>La Gazette</i>						1		1
TOTAL	6	1	19	21	14	87	29	177

Table A2. National provenance of English-language articles which contain at least one occurrence of ‘cultural insecurity’, Factiva database (search specified ‘all dates’, ‘all regions’, ‘English language sources’—see endnote 2).

	Oct 1981–June 1986	July 1986–June 1991	July 1991–June 1996	July 1996–June 2001	July 2001–June 2006	July 2006–June 2011	July 2011–June 2016	TOTAL
Canada	6	20	20	15	14	24	18	117
UK (England, Scotland, Wales, NI)	1		5	11	16	13	20	66
USA	1	9	11	5	14	12	8	60
Australia			10	12	8	12	3	45
India				4	2	3	17	26
New Zealand					12		2	14
Ireland			1		1	7	7	16
Singapore			1	5	2	2		11
Hong Kong		1	1	1	1	1		4
South Africa							4	4
Diverse countries each ≤ 2			1	2	2	3	1	9
TOTAL	8	30	50	55	72	77	80	372